

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The most aggressive resources management tool employed in the National Park Service (NPS) today is wildland fire, second only to urban development in its potential for impacts on a park. Although current technologies for fire management are available to all agencies, the NPS fire management program has been modified to adapt them to the wide diversity of ecosystems found within the National Park System. Wildland fire management in each park must be assessed and defined as an integral part of the park's resource management program.

The National Park Service's policy on fire is expressed in [Director's Order 18 \(link to http://fire.nifc.nps.gov/fire/fmpc/do18fin.htm\)](http://fire.nifc.nps.gov/fire/fmpc/do18fin.htm), Wildland Fire Management, which replaces NPS Management Policies (1988), for the wildland fire program. Reference Manual 18 is issued by the Associate Director, Park Operations and Education and is a technical expression of wildland fire management requirements and procedures that provides detailed definitions and expanded guidance of all information presented in DO-18.

This reference manual will not be published and distributed in the traditional way. Rather, it is being published electronically and is available on the Internet. It contains many links to other information sources valuable to wildland fire and resource managers. To keep this manual a living document, revisions and updates will be made as necessary. As revisions are made they will be noted in the NPS Morning Report and in electronic mail to all fire management officers' and all program assistants' mailing lists. The format of this Internet presentation allows the user to print individual chapters and individual exhibits as needed.

The [Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and Program Review \(link to WPFMP-Ch 2\)](#) of 1995 has established direction for this program that represents a significant departure from past management practices. No longer will all ignitions be classified as either wildfires or prescribed fires. All ignitions occurring in wildland areas are classified as wildland fires or prescribed fires.

Prescribed fires are authorized by approved resource and fire management plans and contribute specifically to a park's resource management objectives. Wildland fires are managed with the appropriate management response as directed by the park's fire management plan and analysis of the specific situation. These fires can be managed entirely or in any part for resource benefits or receive suppression actions to minimize burned area due to high values to be protected, threats to life or property, or other social, political, and economic considerations that outweigh potential environmental benefits. For all fires, if the initial strategy does not accomplish the desired objectives, the [Wildland Fire Situation Analysis \(WFSA\) \(WPFMP-Ch4C5\)](#) process will be utilized to develop and select new strategic alternatives. The [National Wildfire Coordinating Group \(NWCG\) \(http://www.nwcg.gov\)](#) has developed a flowchart

that illustrates the broad framework within which all federal agencies will implement the policy. Figure 1 presents the NWCG flowchart and framework for NPS management of all wildland fires.

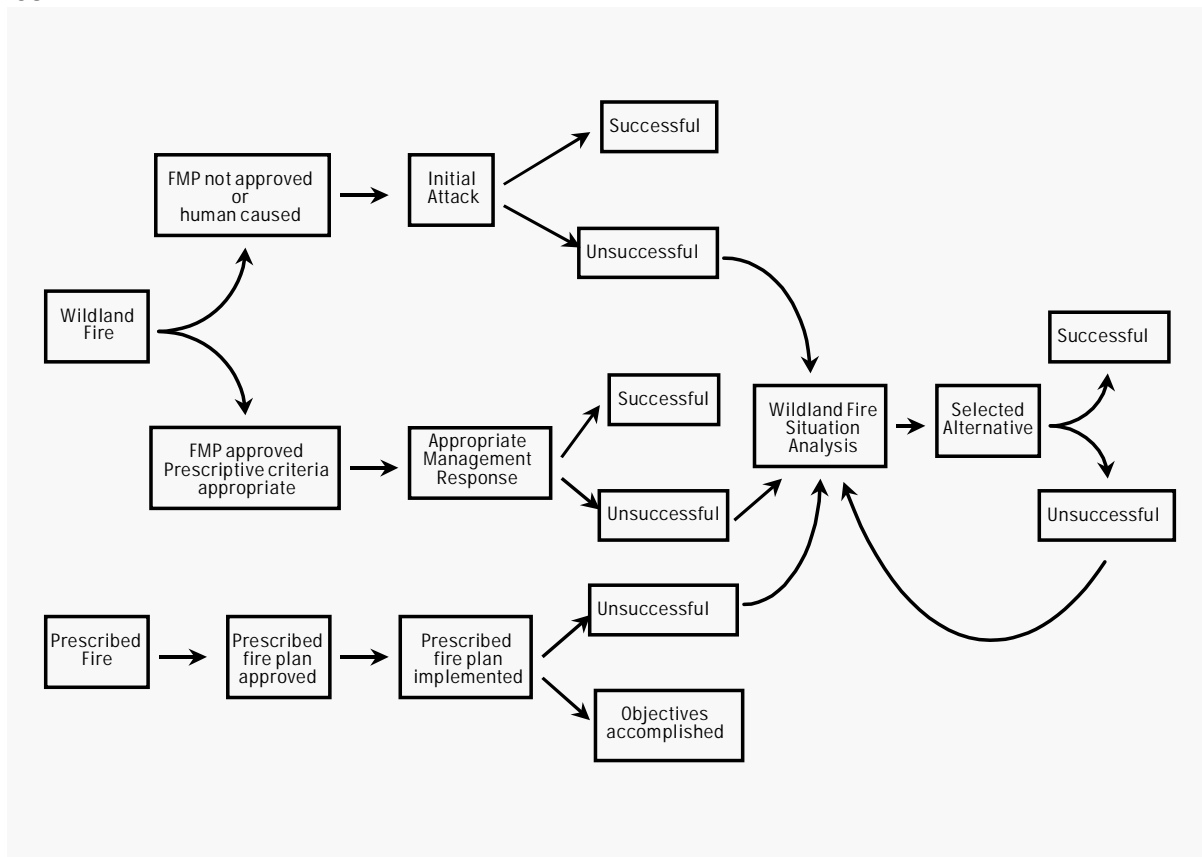


Figure 1. Wildland fire management action flowchart.

The scope and complexity of a park's fire program determines whether or not there should be staff members dedicated to fire management. Park resources and values to be protected are the primary criteria for determining whether a fire will be suppressed or managed for resource benefits. By selecting the appropriate management response, park managers can minimize the amount of damage to park resources. Parks who have a low incidence of fire occurrence or complexity and no dedicated fire staff should assign fire responsibilities as a collateral duty.

The National Park Service averages about seven major unplanned ignitions requiring extended management actions each year. It takes preparation and teamwork to assure that such fires are properly managed. Large fires today are managed through the interagency sharing of available resources, since no one park or forest has the number of people needed to individually manage large and potentially long duration fires. The interagency dispatch

coordination system provides for the interchange of personnel among parks and agencies. Interagency established qualifications ensure sharing of qualified and skilled personnel. The incident commander for a large fire works under a written, limited delegation of authority from the park superintendent. Regardless of agency affiliation, incident management teams will manage such fires within that delegation. Fire staff and managers alike must develop a rapport with their counterparts in other fire management agencies.

Incident Management teams, when assigned to a park unit, manage our prime resources and multi-million dollar incidents under emergency conditions. It is imperative that park managers and fire staff actively work with these teams to ensure the team has a full understanding and appreciation of park resource values, operations and their limitations. Additionally, park managers should identify and support employees in their parks that can serve on these interagency teams to benefit the Service, their own units, and the wildland fire community. Qualified personnel that serve on these teams are usually employees with substantial experience and often hundreds of hours of training to reach these levels. It is in the Service's best interests that these employees are supported, encouraged to participate in these teams, and not withdrawn as they enter management positions.

Fire management funding for the National Park Service is derived from three sources:

1. FIREPRO funds are managed through annual operating program accounts or through project work accounts, depending on the activity. Activities covered include preparedness, permanent staffing, training, monitoring, and accountable equipment purchases.
2. ONPS funds should still be used to support programs in place before FIREPRO and to provide enhanced fire management capabilities in many parks. FIREPRO is intended to identify the minimum acceptable standards which each park fire management program should achieve. The FIREPRO analysis will be used as a justification for seeking adequate funding to implement these standards. In the event that adequate FIREPRO funds are not appropriated, parks may need to supplement FIREPRO funding with ONPS funding to achieve minimum fire management capability. Parks may also use ONPS funds to augment the basic FIREPRO-funded preparedness operation in order to achieve a higher level of response capability or to retain a stronger initial attack capability outside the defined fire season.
3. Wildland fire operations funds within the NPS portion of the Interior firefighting account may be insufficient to cover expenditures for suppression, severity, rehabilitation and hazard fuels management during severe fire years. For these situations, the NPS will first request that the Department transfer wildland fire management funds from other bureaus or, if these funds are exhausted, utilize the emergency authority under Section 102 of the general provisions of the Interior Appropriations Act to transfer funds from

other programs. The NPS will then seek to restore funds to affected programs through a supplemental appropriation.

Both the resources management plan and the fire management plan are key to making fire an effective component of park management. The fire management plan is prerequisite to implement the full range of management options and is an operational document used regularly to guide the fire program; it must be reviewed and updated periodically to remain current. Each fire management plan is reviewed for policy compliance and technical competence by the regional fire management officer and then approved by the park superintendent.

The paramount considerations of each park fire management program will be:

1. Protection of life, both employee and public
2. Protection of facilities and cultural resources
3. Perpetuation of natural resources and their associated processes
4. Perpetuation of cultural and historic scenes.

There is no standard program that fits all parks, but the wildland fire management program of each park must be appropriate for its purpose and resources.